



In Pursuit of Nechaev

"The oath of the Abreks. You don't know it? At midnight the Abrek creeps into the mosque and swears: 'By this holy place, that I venerate, I swear that from today on I will be an outcast. I will shed human blood and have pity for no one. I will wage war on everybody. I swear to rob people of everything dear to their hearts, their conscience and their honor. I will stab the child on his mother's breast, put fire to the poorest beggar's hut and bring sorrow to all places where men rejoice. If I do not fulfill this oath, if love or pity ever creep into my heart, may I never see my father's grave again, may water never quench my thirst nor bread my hunger, may my body be cast on to the road and a dirty dog relieve himself on it.'": The farmer's voice was solemn, his face turned toward the sun, his eyes were green and deep. "Yes," he said, "that is the oath of the Abreks."

"Who swears this oath?"

"Men who have suffered much injustice."

—Kurban Said, Ali & Nino

Shatov says to Uspensky: "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Nechaev joins in: "Yes, in June."

—Fëdor Dostoevsky, Notebooks for The Possessed

With the figure of Sergei Nechaev, Russian Jacobinism presents us with its most extreme manifestation. Nechaev, of course, is of

his time and place. He cannot be understood without reference to the gloomy provincial hole where he grew up, without reference to the growth and mechanization of the textile industry there, which was transforming thousands of serf families like his, and would transform millions more. And we should see him, too, as Stendhal or Balzac would have seen him at the dawn of his lurid career: a bright and ambitious young man, hating the social circumstances that seemed to hold him back from his destiny in the capital. And we must see him in relation to the intellectual and moral world of Pisarev, Ishutin, and Karakozov.

Despite the efforts of some historians to understand him as either just another Russian Jacobin or as a mere gangster, we ought to be skeptical of such deflation. A consideration of Nechaev's career poses clearly for the first time a vital question that the twentieth century has been forced to live out, if not to resolve: the question of revolutionary ethics. What are the sources of value and what are the moral limits, if any, for a secular revolutionary confronting the established order? Nechaev's contribution to the discussion was the first sketch (a small, crude sketch, to be sure) of what it might be like if the revolutionary were emancipated from all traditional ethical restraints.

A consuming involvement in terrorism is sometimes thought of as analogous to a state of war existing between the individual or group and the larger society; for many terrorists the fit is a good one. But this analogy implies that some "ordinary" peacetime moral code has been suspended only for the duration of hostilities. Nechaev didn't really believe that, or did so in some purely theoretical fashion. He believed that *the revolution itself conferred all value*. Neither his revolutionary contemporaries nor his revolutionary successors have been able to accept him. Nor have they really been able to repudiate him. The question posed by his life remains open in a world that must deal with revolutionary terrorism on a considerable scale.

The only account of Nechaev's childhood that we possess at present is that of his sister, F. A. Postnikova; it was recorded by a Soviet historian in 1922, when she was seventy-six years old, and

it had presumably long since achieved the status of family legend.

Prior to 1861, Sergei and his family were serfs. So his attitude toward the Emancipation was entirely different from that of the children of *obshchestvo*, whose naive hopes were followed by a disappointment almost as naive. According to Postnikova, Sergei and his two sisters were brought up largely by their grandparents. Their mother, a skilled seamstress (and, it would seem, a beautiful woman), died when they were all quite young; and their father (who was "strict" with the children) then left the town of Ivanovo and took a job elsewhere as a bartender in a tavern. The children subsequently lived with their grandfather, a painter who worked primarily on local churches and also decorated peasant implements (the shafts on carts are mentioned).

After the children's mother had been dead for a time, her parents asked their son-in-law to marry again, presumably for the sake of the children. He did so, again to a woman who was a dressmaker, and returned to Ivanovo, where he helped his first wife's father with the painting. From time to time, he also worked as a waiter, or a "lackey," serving tea, drinks, and hors d'oeuvres in the houses of the Ivanovo rich. Young Sergei, according to his sister, hated this and wished his father wouldn't do it. (Was he called upon to carry trays himself? One can't help wondering.)

When the boy was nine or ten (this would be about 1857), his father put him to work as a messenger boy in one of the local factory offices. When he had been on the job for only a short time, he lost a letter and was severely beaten by his father. From this episode Sergei's sister dated his resolve to educate himself and escape from the life of humiliation and poverty that seemed to stretch before him.¹ Over the next few years, the desire to escape, to "make it," was to be eclipsed by other ideas—of revenge and revolution.

These memories seem almost too apropos, drawn from a primer on psychobiography—the "strict" father, the humiliation of this powerful figure cringing before the local plutocracy (Ivanovo was a developing textile center, which was with consid-

erable exaggeration referred to as "the Russian Manchester"), then the crucial episode that leads to the turning point in the boy's life. In view of the fact that the account dates from 1922 and of the sympathy with which Nechaev's sister regarded his life, the probability is high that we are getting a kind of well-polished family myth, one that had been in the making for a long time. But myths can be useful; this one directs our attention to the tremendous class hatred that animated Nechaev.

In September 1870, when he was about twenty-two years old, Nechaev published an eight-page "periodical" entitled *Commune (Obshchina)*, much of which was devoted to telling the Western European radical public "who he was" and what he (and his "party") wanted. In it he answered those questions as follows:

We are the children of hungry, deprived fathers and of mothers who have been driven to stupefaction and imbecility.

We grew up surrounded by filth and ignorance, among insults and humiliations; from the cradle we were despised and oppressed by every possible scoundrel who lives happily under the existing order.

We are they for whom family was a foretaste of hard labor, for whom the best part of their youth was spent in the struggle with poverty and hunger; the time of love, the time of passion [was consumed in] the grim pursuit of a piece of bread.

We are they whose whole past overflowed with bitterness and suffering, whose future holds the same humiliations, insults, hungry days, sleepless nights, and finally trials, jails, prisons, the mines or the gallows.

We find ourselves in an unbearable position and, somehow or other, we want to get out of it.

That is why in the *alteration of the existing order of social relations* consists all our wished for aspirations, all our cherished aims.

We can want only a popular revolution.

We want it and we will make it.²

Behind the rhetoric, one feels the misery and visceral hatred. No child of *obshchestvo* or gentry Russia could have felt this way. Nechaev's path to the revolution had nothing to do with guilt.

Vera Zasulich, who was subsequently to have a long and remarkable revolutionary career and would die a Menshevik in Lenin's Russia, wrote of Nechaev as follows:

[He] was not a product of our intelligentsia milieu. He was alien to it. It was not opinions, derived from contact with this milieu, which underlay his revolutionary energy, but burning hatred, and not only against the government, not only against institutions, not only against the exploiters of the people, but against all of *obshchestvo*, all educated strata, all these gentlefolk, rich and poor, conservative, liberal and radical. If he did not actually detest the young people who were attracted to him, he certainly did not feel the least sympathy toward them, nor a shade of pity, but much contempt. Children of detested *obshchestvo*, bound to it by countless ties and thus far more inclined to love than hate—they could be for him an instrument or a weapon, but in no case comrades or even followers.³

The first really “hard” source material we have on Nechaev dates from 1863, when he was sixteen years old. At that time, he was working as a sign painter in Ivanovo. He was the third generation, at least, in his family to be a “painter”—a traditional motif in an otherwise quite untraditional biography. In his apparently considerable spare time, he was slogging away at the gymnasium curriculum. We have a series of letters from Nechaev to F. D. Nefëdov, another young man from a servile background who had succeeded in escaping from Ivanovo and getting to Moscow.⁴ Nefëdov’s life is striking in relation to Nechaev’s: how similar and yet how different. They shared the dreary provincial background, the driving ambition, the hatred of the local merchants and factory owners. But Nefëdov became a respectable radical: journalist, editor, and writer of stories—the champion of the people from whom he had escaped, if perhaps their sentimentalizer as well. In 1865, the young Nefëdov got his first break, as editor of the Moscow journal *Bibliophile (Bibliofil’)*; in 1872, as Nechaev’s astonishing career was coming to an end, Nefëdov was publishing, in the *Russian Gazette*, a highly successful series of muckraking articles entitled “Our Mills and Factories.”

Their correspondence reveals the strong impression made on both these young men by V. A. Dement’ev, a writer of vaguely radical and democratic sympathies and avuncular temperament who had also recently left Ivanovo for Moscow. He had, a year or two previously, helped introduce Nechaev, Nefëdov, and

other Ivanovo young people to a variety of cultural activities, including drama. They built a theater together; Postnikova recalls that old Nechaev did the sets, so he was certainly not systematically hostile to his son's ambitions. She also tells us that her brother exhibited considerable talent as an actor—a theatrical gift that he was soon to reveal in a quite different context.

It is also clear from the correspondence that the departure of both Dement'ev and Nefëdov was a considerable blow to Nechaev; Ivanovo seemed bleaker, and his desire to escape intensified. Virtually every one of Nechaev's letters contains frantic pleas for books and bitter complaints about the slow progress of his studies; German and mathematics, in particular, he found hard going "without teachers." More and more often, as the months went by, he vented his spleen on the filth and tedium of Ivanovo. He also chronicled with heavy irony the doings of the local "big shots"; on occasion the irony would give way to furious words that reveal more immediately the depth of his feelings. But young Nechaev at this stage of the game was far from a hardened or systematic radical; indeed, he appears to have read almost no radical literature. At the end of one letter, he inquired of Nefëdov if he still observed the fast days.

In early 1865, the letters became more despondent, although he wrote hopefully of coming to Moscow and entering the gymnasium in the sixth or seventh class and going on to the university from there. He wanted to be off by summer, as he had come to feel that his family regarded him as a "drone." His father had been to some degree supportive; now, Nechaev believed, *papa-sha* just wanted him to take off somewhere. By August he was in Moscow.

At this point our information thins out again. We know that Nefëdov was his initial contact in Moscow; presumably through his agency, Nechaev was lodged in the small pension run by Mikhail Pogodin, the elderly historian and publicist. Dement'ev was apparently important here: he had served for a time as Pogodin's secretary, and it appears that Nechaev followed in his footsteps.⁵ Pogodin's biographer does not record the presence of Nechaev anywhere in his twenty-two volumes, but Pogodin

made such a bad impression on his student and secretary that he was subsequently marked down on a special list of those to be made away with as soon as the revolution broke out, along with such important pillars of the *status quo* as General Shuvalov.

In Moscow, Nechaev changed his plans; instead of trying to get into a gymnasium, he took his examinations for the post of elementary-school teacher. He did not pass, and in April 1866, he moved to St. Petersburg. He arrived around the time of Karakozov's attempt on the life of the Tsar, and the event made a strong impression on him. He wrote, subsequently, that "the foundations of our sacred cause were laid by Karakozov on the morning of 4th April 1866. . . . His action must be regarded as a prologue. Let us act, my friends, in such a way that the play will soon begin." Franco Venturi observes at this point that the prologue of Nechaev's own life was coming to an end and the main drama beginning.⁶

Between the spring of 1866 and the summer of 1868, Nechaev ceased forever to be the raw boy from Ivanovo and became the astonishing revolutionary intriguer whom we encounter for the first time in the student "unrest" of 1868-69. In St. Petersburg he did succeed in passing his teacher's examination and got a job teaching "the word of God"—that is, religion—in the Sergievsky Parish School. And in this period, too, he acquired a set of revolutionary opinions—or perhaps a revolutionary orientation would be a better way of putting it—to express the hatred within him.

We know little enough of Nechaev's life in the capital in this two-year period, but we can be sure of one revolutionary "influence" on him as we work our way toward 1868—that of Pëtr Nikitich Tkachëv. One of the most determined and articulate of the Russian Jacobins, Tkachëv became really well known only as an émigré journalist in the 1870s. But he had been a radical pamphleteer and activist for more than six years when he encountered Nechaev at some now-forgotten political meeting or social gathering in 1866 or 1867. The two were in the way of being close collaborators by the fall of 1868, and the imprint of Tkachëv's thinking is clear in Nechaev's first recorded political pronouncements.

Tkachëv's biography might be taken as prototypical of a " 'sixties person," as men and women of his generation often referred to themselves. He was born in 1844 into a family of minor Pskov gentry; he lost his father early in his life, and his initial education took place under his mother's supervision. He was sent to St. Petersburg, where he attended the gymnasium and in the fall of 1861 went on to the university. Thus his intellectual formation took place in the euphoric atmosphere of the new era and in the capital, where that progressive atmosphere was most powerful and pervasive. He read Herzen, Dobroliubov, and—significantly—Pisarev. He took part in the student demonstrations of the fall of 1861, was arrested, did time in the fortress at Kronstadt, and was released. During the next several years, he wrote for Pisarev's *Russian Word* and (after it was shut down) for the *Cause (Delo)*. He was arrested three more times prior to 1868, the third time for peripheral involvement with Ishutin, but he was soon released.

Even a casual scrutiny of Tkachëv's life during the 1860s testifies to the degree to which institutions of higher education had become the recruiting ground of Russian radicalism. As has since been the case in other cultures, a large semiradical (or potentially radical) community grew up in cities with a substantial student population. Tkachëv testified frequently and enthusiastically to his belief in the energy and social creativity of Russia's youth, and he lived in that student-based community where a prolonged adolescence was possible and where one's radical identity could be formed.

Tkachëv was also typical of the 1860s in his elitism: the masses, he believed, could be counted on only as a destructive force; and their energies would have to be directed by intelligentsia leaders. A few years later, Tkachëv gave public expression to this revolutionary elitism in his Geneva journal, *Tocsin (Nabat)*, where he set forth his influential view of the proper organization for the revolutionary party: small, disciplined, totally centralized. Nechaev found Tkachëv's point of view much to his taste, and the two became part of an informal circle that read Filippo Buonarrotti's *La Conspiration de Babeuf* and other "Jacobin"

classics that fall—until such time as reading was wholly superseded by action.

When the students returned for the fall semester in 1868, they were probably as disposed to take on the authorities as they had been at any time since the big student protests of 1861.⁷ As had been the case at that time, the institutions of student corporatism were the big issue; the complex consequences of student dissatisfaction were no more to be confined to the campus than in 1861. But now educated society in the capital was not involved or sympathetic to anything like the same degree it had been seven years before. And lacking the sympathetic resonance provided by Petersburg society, the unrest of 1868–69 was a smaller and more restricted affair.

Three institutions in the capital contributed substantially to the general student population from which the agitation emerged—the university, the Medical-Surgical Academy, and the Technological Institute. The student population of all three had merged into one body, closely connected by common lodgings, friends, and roommates. The financial need of the poorer students was well known to this entire population, and so were the graphic inequalities in the way the various institutions dealt with their students. Under the reform-minded aegis of Dmitry Miliutin, the Ministry of War had tacitly ignored the university rules of 1863 and allowed the students of the Medical-Surgical Academy to move very far in the direction of corporate institutions. Not only did the medical students have a library and a *kassa* for those who needed support, they had a substantial cafeteria as well. The library was so much a student sanctuary that the government inspector made a point of staying away “to avoid unpleasantness.”⁸ The other two institutions had nothing comparable.

Radical activity in St. Petersburg had been at a low ebb since the post-Karakozov roundup in the summer of 1866. But student corporatist sentiment was on the rise, providing a substantial body of potential recruits. Shortly after the semester began, the September number of a new émigré radical journal, the *People's Cause* (*Narodnoe delo*), began to circulate among some of the

students. The lead article, written by Mikhail Bakunin, caused considerable stir among the minority with radical sympathies. In characteristically flamboyant fashion, he heaped scorn on the notion of reforming Russian society through the diffusion of "enlightenment" and proclaimed that only total revolution could cure Russia's ills. Perhaps Bakunin's journal found its way into the shelves of the student library at the Medical-Surgical Academy, which often stocked illegal literature and where radical sympathies among the students were most intense. In any case, students were soon discussing the merits of his case. For some, the subject was soon made manageable by being reduced to a slogan, "*nauka ili trud*," which may be freely translated as "academics or labor." And the extreme interpretation of "labor" meant abandoning one's privileged life altogether, living with the people—becoming an artisan, perhaps—and devoting one's full time to preparing the revolution. In other words, what would soon become known as "going to the people."⁹

The interest aroused by Bakunin's article helped set the intellectual stage that fall for a sizable group of vaguely progressive students who wanted to legalize and develop the corporate institutions of the university and the Technological Institute, and a minority whose radical goals transcended the student world and centered on the seemingly unquenchable hope of peasant revolt and how to direct it.

The onset of these discussions coincided with Nechaev's arrival in the university milieu as a "free auditor." We are in the dark as to how evolved his political views were in September 1868, but it seems likely enough that this was his first exposure to Bakunin's viewpoint. And it is clear that Bakunin's anti-intellectual formulations suited Nechaev perfectly. Again and again in the articles and proclamations Nechaev was to write over the next several years, he would disparage "academics," "literature," and "study," exalting by contrast a supremely dedicated, active, and allegedly practical revolutionary work. And of course it was to Bakunin that he would turn during his trip abroad the following spring.

As the autumn wore on, the students began to meet in larger and larger groups, and the legalization of *skhodki* became one of their principal demands. By late December, when some of these meetings were drawing up to several hundred students,¹⁰ a clear split had developed between the radical and moderate positions. The radicals—with Nechaev egging them on—were demanding large demonstrations and other confrontation tactics that certainly would not have persuaded the minister of education to smile upon student corporate institutions in the capital of the empire.

It is interesting to observe Nechaev's style at the *skhodki*. He seldom spoke in public; no doubt his preference for behind-the-scenes work was connected with his realization that he did not cut a very impressive figure in a public arena whose style was still in part the product of *obshchestvo* Russia. His violent hatred of "salon oratory" suggests as much, although on several occasions he did speak with some effectiveness. In private he was terse and deeply contemptuous of the moderates; frequently, after the open meeting was over, he would gather two or three particularly bold spirits or well-connected newcomers together and shepherd them back to his lodgings at the Sergievsky School for some private talk. His caution was well founded, as one or more police agents were often in attendance at the larger *skhodki*.

In fact, Nechaev and Tkachëv and several others were attempting to set up a revolutionary organization. Among their colleagues in this enterprise were Zemfiry Ralli-Arbore, a medical student of Rumanian extraction who subsequently became an activist in Swiss anarchist politics, the Ametistov brothers, and Vladimir Orlov, a priest's son who had been a teacher in Ivanovo. Their tactics, in the student politics of the fall and winter, aimed not at the success but at the failure of the campaign for a library and legalized *skhodki*; they hoped that a significant number of the more hotheaded of the students could be brought into serious and public confrontation with the authorities. Having thus compromised themselves and been—at the very least—expelled from the university, they would be available as revolutionary

junior officers to help direct the peasant insurrection that Tkachëv and Nechaev expected to break out on or about February 19, 1870.

The fixing of an exact date for a peasant insurrection has been interpreted as being a particularly striking example of the unfounded belief in the *narod*, common among Russian radicals, as well as being absurdly precise—not the eighteenth of February, but the nineteenth! In fact the line of reasoning followed by Tkachëv and Nechaev was by no means as simpleminded as it might at first glance appear. According to the terms of the Emancipation Statute of February 19, 1861, the freed serfs were to enter into a period of “temporary obligation,” according to which they would continue to occupy their allotments of land, paying their former masters money or labor dues for its use. Only at the end of nine years were they to be confronted with a real option: to leave without the land, or to continue in possession until they had managed the herculean task of paying off their debt to the state, which had purchased their “freedom” from their former owners. A good many people of a decidedly nonrevolutionary outlook were beginning to wonder with trepidation what the peasants would do when the day came and they had to make the crucial decision about their relations with their landlords and their economic future. Tkachëv and Nechaev were banking on the catalytic effect of this moment—after the disappointment of the Emancipation and nine years’ economic deterioration in the position of the mass of the peasants—which they believed would lead to a series of local disorders. And these disorders would either themselves develop into a major agrarian insurrection or could be made to do so if there were enough dedicated revolutionary activists around the country to abet the process. Hence their desire to exploit the grievances of the students, to create from their ranks the organization that could turn these outbreaks into the revolution.

(The disorders did not materialize, and the revolution had to be postponed. At least one factor that Nechaev and Tkachëv had not banked on was the stabilizing influence of the peasant commune. For most peasants, financial redemption proceeded by the

community, and most peasants simply continued in their status of temporary obligation after February 19. Their patience again proved—in the eyes of the radicals—simply inexhaustible.)

Nechaev and his associates drafted a *Program of Revolutionary Action*,¹¹ which set forth their aspirations and a kind of rough timetable. Until May 1869, the focus would be on recruitment among students in the capitals and to a lesser extent in other university cities. After that date, the radicalized students would move out into the provinces, attempting to recruit first from various *raznochintsy* groups and the village poor, and finally moving to propaganda among the peasantry. In the fall of 1869, a revolutionary center was to be created, making use of “specialists” in the social and natural sciences (a curiously modern note)!

Vera Zasulich, in her memoirs,¹² described an illuminating episode in Nechaev’s ongoing effort to control and direct the activities of the student radicals. At a *skhodka* in early 1869, when a number of the moderates had already dropped out, Nechaev made one of his rare speeches. He announced that the time had now come to pass from words to deeds (how he loved to say this!); as a pledge to this effect, those who were not “afraid for their skins” should sign their names to a sheet of paper. Before someone had the presence of mind to say how foolish this was, there were close to ninety signatures on the paper—which went into Nechaev’s pocket! The document subsequently found its way to the Third Section, by what route we do not know. If Nechaev actually *did* turn the names in, it would have been perfectly consonant with his idea of “radicalizing” them, willy-nilly, in time for the projected February revolution.

Thinking back subsequently on the winter of 1869, Zasulich found it odd that Nechaev was spending so much time studying French. One suspects that he was already planning a dramatic exit to Europe when, in the first days of March, the student movement reached an unexpected climax. An individual confrontation between a professor and a student led to the expulsion of the student, and the episode served as a catalyst: classes were disrupted, petitions were presented, a large number of students were expelled and some were arrested. Ironically enough, it was

the despised moderates who took the lead, but a number of the extremist party were arrested, including Tkachëv, Ralli, and A. G. Dement'eva, who had been living with Tkachëv. Ralli was arrested almost immediately upon his return from Moscow, where he had been organizing and recruiting for the revolution.

Just as the first arrests were imminent, Nechaev contrived a dramatic exit—the first of those memorable examples of mystification for which he became known. An unknown person, calling himself a “student,” delivered a letter to Vera Zasulich. He had allegedly been on the street when a carriage passed by (in some versions it is described as a “police coach”); a hand emerged and dropped the letter, which stated that Nechaev had been arrested and was being taken to the Fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul. High officials in the Third Section denied that Nechaev had been arrested; it appears, indeed, that the police knew little or nothing of him at the time. His young, illiterate, worshipful sister—who had been informed by her brother that he expected to be arrested—naturally refused to believe these official denials and nearly went out of her mind with worry. His roommate, Evlampiia Ametistov, also reported that Nechaev had been threatened with arrest, so the belief quickly became general in student circles that he *had* been taken off to the fortress.

The timing of Nechaev's initial piece of mystification provides some food for thought. At this point—January 1869—Nechaev may have felt that his first political involvement had not led to very much. He had not been able to control the student movement. Even the “committee” that was to control the students in the interests of the revolution seems to have remained at the talking stage; Ralli and perhaps others had reacted to his plans with some reserve.¹³ Was he unpleasantly conscious of how small he still looked to others? Of how little weight his name carried? Both his phony “arrest” and his involvement with the great names of the emigration were calculated to demonstrate how quickly a “name” could be created if one went about it with sufficient energy and purpose—two attributes he had in abundance!

Some two weeks after the flap about his arrest, his sister, acquaintances, and associates began receiving letters from Nechaev. He had been arrested, he claimed, had escaped, had been caught in Odessa, had escaped again. He enclosed a proclamation of the First International over the signature of Bakunin, and demanded student demonstrations, but no one, at that point, felt able to oblige.

The second arrest was cut from the same cloth as the first. Nechaev had in fact gone to Moscow, where Vladimir Orlov had introduced him (under the name of "Pavlov," one of his favorite aliases) to Pëtr Uspensky, a young radical of an enthusiastic temperament. Uspensky had known Ishutin and more recently been close to Feliks Volkhovsky, German Lopatin, and other young radicals Nechaev wanted to meet. From Moscow, Nechaev went to Kiev and Odessa, and from there, on to Switzerland. Before leaving Russia, Nechaev sent Ogarëv a copy of the manifesto he had drafted a short time before: *To the Students of the University, the Academy, and the Petersburg Technological Institute*. On April 1, Ogarëv passed it on to Herzen, with a brief note of explanation: a circumstantial beginning to what was to be a very trying episode in the lives of the Herzen family, Ogarëv, and—above all—Mikhail Bakunin.¹⁴

When Nechaev arrived in Switzerland, toward the end of March 1869, the public careers of Herzen and Ogarëv were really at an end. The second half of the 1860s had been a period of personal and political nightmare for Herzen. The *Bell* had declined into the merest wisp of its former self and had finally expired in 1868. From the standpoint of émigré politics, the period following Karakozov's attempt saw the climax of the estrangement that had been developing between Herzen and the younger radicals for several years—they looked on him, as he bleakly remarked to Ogarëv, as at best "an interesting fossilized bone."¹⁵ Since leaving England forever in March 1865, Herzen had traveled here and there across the continent of Europe, increasingly overwhelmed by personal tragedy; shortly before his departure, the twins—his children by Natal'ia Tuchkova-

Ogarëva—died in a diphtheria epidemic in Paris, a misery from which their mother (who had lived with Herzen since 1857) never really recovered. Nor were Herzen's relations with any of his children really satisfactory.¹⁶

Ogarëv, increasingly a prey to alcoholism and epilepsy, had lived in Geneva since April 1865, nursed lovingly and jealously by Mary Sutherland, the English prostitute with whom he spent the last nineteen years of his life. His sobriety was uncertain, and after falling in the street in February 1868, he never entirely regained the use of one leg.

Bakunin had remained far more hopeful about the revolutionary capacities of the "younger generation" than Herzen had. He was neither so spiritually spent as Herzen nor so physically exhausted as Ogarëv; indeed, one of the most active periods of his extraordinary life was in progress at the time of Nechaev's arrival. Bakunin was one of the great organizers of paper and semipaper organizations, but by early 1869 he was involved in the politics of a very real grouping—the International Working Men's Association—in which he was attempting to secure a special role for himself and his International Social-Democratic Alliance. Bakunin was as remarkable a figure in the rather bourgeois radical politics of Western Europe as Peter the Great had been in the Dutch dockyards almost two centuries before. To some—Marx and Engels, for instance—he was anathema; to others, like James Guillaume, he became a revered if sometimes inexplicable master.¹⁷

In attempting to understand Bakunin's political style, it helps to remember that he came from a cultivated and aristocratic Russian family, and that he had been, throughout his childhood and early adolescence, particularly cosseted and admired. To a great many Russian gentry intellectuals, Western European society had always seemed unpleasantly bourgeois, confining, and philistine, and in Bakunin these feelings achieved their most extreme expression. He was, culturally speaking, a pathological aristocrat—nature's nobleman gone mad. Although he could be extremely generous and was courageous to a fault, he never acquired any of the prosaic virtues for which the middle classes

have been noted: reliability, restraint, regularity, or the capacity to foresee the results of one's actions. He was an inveterate, lifelong sponger, as much by temperament as through force of circumstances. And he hated what one might call the bourgeois vices—self-interest, egotism, slyness—with a ferocious passion that never abated. Indeed, it is almost true to say that for him the vices of the petty trader were the *only* vices that really existed. This central aspect of Bakunin's character accounts in large part for his remarkable and protracted credulousness about Nechaev. If there ever was someone ill-equipped to reject a colleague on grounds of fanaticism, it was Bakunin.

Since the fall of 1868, Bakunin and his wife, Antonia, had been settled in Geneva, and since the first days of 1869 he had been occupied almost exclusively with the affairs of his Social-Democratic Alliance and its relationship to the First International. Bakunin's marriage was a less important chapter of his life than those of Herzen and Ogarëv, but it was even more bizarre and within a few years was to become almost as painful. Antonia Kwiatkowska was the daughter of a Siberian merchant; Bakunin had met and married her while in exile in 1858. She was twenty-five years younger than her husband and never shared any of his political interests. As she grew older, the life of poverty and insecurity that marriage to Bakunin entailed took its toll on her, and it is fair to say that by the beginning of the 1870s she cared only for her family, which included her parents and sister in Siberia and her three children. The father of those children was not Bakunin, but his close friend, an Italian revolutionary named Carlo Gambuzzi.

The fact that Bakunin's marriage was apparently unconsummated raises the question of his sexuality, one of those awkward issues that cannot be either resolved or ignored. It cannot be ducked in this case, because a powerful element of sexual attraction clearly bound Bakunin to Nechaev. Bakunin often referred to Nechaev as "Boy" (in English, but punning on the Russian *boi*, meaning "fight" or "struggle"). There are other instances of Bakunin's being attracted to masterly men, and the degree to which he adopted a "feminine" role of submission in relation to

Nechaev is suggested by an odd and apparently apocryphal anecdote that made the rounds of Swiss radical circles. As the story had it, Bakunin had promised, in writing, to submit to Nechaev in all things, even to the point of forgery; as a token of submission, he signed the declaration with a woman's name: Matrëna.¹⁸

How Bakunin and Nechaev actually met we do not know. The encounter took place, in all probability, in the second week of April 1869 in Geneva, and it produced a famous passage, which has been quoted in every account of the relations between the two men. On April 13, Bakunin wrote to James Guillaume that

At present I am engrossed in Russian affairs. Our youth, theoretically and in practice the most revolutionary in the world, is in great ferment. . . . I have here with me now one of those young fanatics who know no doubts, who fear nothing, who realize that many of them will perish at the hands of the government but who nevertheless have decided that they will not relent until the people rise. They are magnificent, these young fanatics. Believers without God and heroes without phrases!¹⁹

This passage makes another aspect of the situation clear: Nechaev, from the beginning, had a quasi-mythic stature for Bakunin. Bakunin believed in the escape from the Fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, and defended Nechaev from those who were more cautious or openly skeptical. To him, Nechaev embodied the long-hoped-for *Russian* revolution—and also provided a kind of continuity by which Bakunin himself could help shape that revolution. This was the student for whom the aging professor of revolution had been longing. E. H. Carr expresses this side of things eloquently:

[Bakunin] had long lost touch with Russia itself. . . . The arrival of Nechaev brought him, for the first time in many years, a breath of his native land. He would never see it again. But still, in the midst of his international preoccupations, it often haunted his dreams; and here was a chance of working for the cause of revolution in the country which was nearest to his heart. No other land could appeal to him in this way. The sentimental side of his nature, which seemed to have died with his memories of home and childhood long years ago,

revived and reopened for this dangerous and seductive Russian "Boy."²⁰

Nechaev's decision to go abroad was motivated, as we have seen, by a justified belief that a police crackdown was coming, a circumstance that did not displease him in the least. Indeed, he contributed in his own way to "radicalizing" the Russian students with whom he had been working, as many of the telegrams and letters that he dispatched from Switzerland after his arrival on March 29 fell into the hands of the police and led to the arrest of their intended recipients. Over the summer, Nechaev sent a staggering quantity of pamphlet literature back to Russia as well—with the same dire results for many of the addressees. The Petersburg authorities alone confiscated 560 pieces of mail, addressed to 387 different people!²¹ But Switzerland was not merely a political resting place for Nechaev; he also wanted to enlist what remained of the prestige of the radical emigration in the service of his revolutionary organizing. More than those of Herzen and Ogarëv, Bakunin's name was something to conjure with in Russia.

The drafting of proclamations and the writing of articles was the major enterprise of the summer, and Bakunin was a wholehearted collaborator, to the confusion of historians, who have spilled considerable ink in the attempt to resolve who wrote what.²² Without entering into this fascinating if slightly arcane matter of authorship, we can certainly identify the points of view of the principals. Ogarëv's role was minor. He seems to have written only a brief pamphlet entitled *To the Russian Students!* (which Herzen, arriving in Geneva in May, disparaged). He did take a poem he had previously dedicated to a young radical friend and, at Bakunin's urging, rededicate it to Nechaev. Entitled "Student," the poem boasts a heroic protagonist who ends his life "in the snowy prisons of Siberia." Nechaev took many copies back with him to Russia; this scrap of doggerel added to his mantle of glamour but has further confused those concerned with the details of his biography.

The principal themes of the pamphlet *How the Revolutionary*

Question Presents Itself are clearly Bakunin's. Take the passage on brigandage:

Brigandage is one of the most honoured aspects of the people's life in Russia. At the time when the state of Moscow was being founded, brigandage represented the desperate protest of the people against the horrible social order of the times. . . . The brigand is always the hero, the defender, the avenger of the people, the irreconcilable enemy of the entire state regime, both in its civil and its social aspects, the life and death fighter against our statist-aristocratic, official-clerical civilization. An understanding of brigandage is essential for an understanding of the history of the Russian people. . . . The brigand, in Russia, is the true and only revolutionary—the revolutionary without phrase-making and without bookish rhetoric.* Popular revolution is born from the merging of the revolt of the brigand with that of the peasant. . . . Such were the revolts of Stenka Razin and Pugachëv . . . and even today this is still the world of the Russian revolution.²³

The separation between the "two Russias," the belief in the revolution as the destruction of the alien (or "German") dynasty and court, the supersession of "privilege Russia" by the *narod*—all this had been formulated by Herzen during his most radical period, by Shchapov, and by Bakunin himself. These Slavophile-tinged propositions had already become central to the general vocabulary of Populism. Shchapov in the early 1860s, and Bakunin a few years later, had come to regard the great peasant revolts as prefiguring the Russian revolution. Both men also understood that the principal ingredient the great jacqueries of Razin and Pugachëv had lacked was *consciousness*—which would be supplied, in the forthcoming holocaust, by the radical wing of the intelligentsia.

Bakunin now believed that he saw the "revolutionary prototype," who would accomplish this mission, incarnate in Nechaev. In a brief pamphlet entitled *The Revolutionary Catechism*, Nechaev attempted to describe "the revolutionary" in more general and abstract terms, with Bakunin improving the

*Note the similarity between the phrases employed here and those Bakunin used to describe Nechaev in the letter cited above.

style and attempting to link the mission of the contemporary intelligentsia revolutionary with the long history of brigandage and revolt that stretched back into the misty times of the Muscovite autocracy. In time, Bakunin would become bitterly aware of how little Nechaev believed in the *narod*, its values and experience—things that Bakunin never ceased to care about, even when he was most obsessed with “revolutionary prototypes” from the intelligentsia.

Despite Bakunin's participation in the final version of the *Catechism*,²⁴ its direction and force are completely Jacobin: it is the culmination of the tradition that began with Zaichnevsky's *Young Russia* and was continued in the Hell of Ishutin. And Nechaev was further indebted, in his portrait of the revolutionary, to an earlier sketch by his first mentor, Tkačëv.²⁵ Just when and how the *Catechism* was written remains obscure, but the most plausible assumption is that it was begun in Russia, in conjunction with the scenario foreseen in the *Program of Revolutionary Action*. Then, during the summer of 1869, it must have been rewritten or at least heavily edited by Nechaev and Bakunin. Whatever Bakunin's role in the *Catechism*'s creation, the old man soon came to think of it (accurately enough) as Nechaev's work; he referred to it (in a private letter to Nechaev) as “your catechism” and as “a catechism of abreks”^{*26}—decisive confirmation of what is really clear from a careful reading of the text.

The first half of the *Catechism* is largely a chart of a profoundly hierarchical organization, designed in such a way that information can move up and orders down with maximum efficacy. The cells and sections into which the members are organized are linked together by only one person, in such a way as to keep the membership as isolated as possible from one other. If someone is arrested, he or she will be able to implicate only a very few people; on the other hand, all the sense of solidarity that has so often lent cohesion to less centralized organizations has been lost. At the top of the entire organization is “the Committee,”

*An *abrek* was a Caucasian outcast. See the epigraph to this chapter.

whose name Nechaev would later invoke so often in support of his policies. When the initial draft of the *Catechism* was made, the Committee presumably was to include Tkachëv, Nechaev, Ralli, and a handful of others. With the arrest of most of its members in the late winter of 1869, however, the Committee clearly existed only on paper—which did not prevent Nechaev from speaking of it as a real body to Bakunin and Ogarëv. Bakunin, in fact, also invented an imaginary organization—the World Revolutionary Alliance—and made Nechaev a member. This mutual mystification, wrote Carr, “was a delicious situation which can have few parallels either in comedy or in history.”²⁷ The comedy became grim and modern, however, when the Committee demanded the murder of a recalcitrant member a few months later in Moscow.

The second half of the *Catechism* is the famous description of the “revolutionary prototype” and his relationship with the world around him. The revolutionary world so grimly and tersely described here is at the opposite extreme from that later envisaged by the leaders and theoreticians of the Second International, where (oversimplifying only a little) we may say that the revolutionary leadership was seen to grow out of its constituency and express its aspirations in the most natural way possible. The bottom line is the same: the revolution means the “liberation and happiness” of the poorest and most exploited segment of the working class. But Nechaev’s revolutionary is an outsider even to those for whom the revolution must be made and whose sufferings will fuel it: “our association will promote with all its power and resources the development and intensification of those misfortunes and those evils which must finally exhaust the patience of the people and impel it to a general uprising.”²⁸ Here, then, is an early suggestion of the strategy generally characterized as “the worse the better,” a viewpoint inveterately hostile to every kind of reformist effort and therefore never popular with most working people.

In the prerevolutionary world, according to the *Catechism*, the revolutionary is to live in the most extreme alienation and isolation. Death is an ever-present reality, almost obsessive-

ly so.²⁹ "The revolutionary," Nechaev begins, "is a doomed man."

He has no interests of his own, no affairs, no feelings, no attachments, no property, not even a name. Everything in him is absorbed by a single exclusive interest, a single thought, a single passion—the revolution.

2. In the depths of his being, not only in words, but in deed, he has broken every tie with the civil order and with the entire educated world, with all laws, conventions, generally accepted conditions, and with the morality of this world. He is its implacable enemy, and if he continues to live in it, that is only the more certainly to destroy it.

Gone in the *Catechism* is every trace of the intelligentsia's love of culture and the book. Even science is demoted to a tertiary position: "[The revolutionary] knows of only one science, the science of destruction." We remember Nechaev's solitary struggle to master the gymnasium curriculum in Ivanovo; by now, his hostility to books has become extreme and ideological. "He who learns of the revolutionary deed in books," Nechaev wrote in his periodical, the *People's Vengeance* (*Narodnaia rasprava*), "will always be a revolutionary do-nothing."³⁰ Not only is the revolutionary utterly cut off from all "tender and effeminate feelings" of friendship and love, but honor and integrity must also be sacrificed, and even vengeance and hatred. In other words, personality itself must be extinguished. Here is the program of Hell pushed to its logical conclusion.

The most dramatic expression of the revolutionary's position is the complete repudiation of all traditional moral norms in the name of revolutionary utility. "Moral for [the revolutionary]," wrote Nechaev, "is everything that facilitates the triumph of the revolution. Immoral and criminal is everything which hinders it."³¹ And in the coming months and years, Nechaev attempted to live out this prescription in a nineteenth-century world that was not yet prepared to understand him.

Nechaev specified in detail his attitude toward the comrades, sympathizers, dupes, and enemies by whom the revolutionary would be surrounded: a kind of demonic Benthamite schema

that one wishes the founder of utilitarianism could have lived to read. All the revolutionaries are "revolutionary capital," and one is to try to derive the "greatest possible return" from the capital at one's disposal. The revolutionary has no tie with his comrades other than their usefulness.

With the enemies of the revolution, practical considerations also prevail: all those whose continued existence harms "the cause" should be eliminated, but those whose bestial behavior brings the revolution closer should be temporarily allowed to live. Liberals should be ruthlessly manipulated and compromised, not to be drawn into the revolution as participants but to sow social chaos. (Nechaev's attitude toward them seems to have hardened since the student politics of the previous winter.) Last, but certainly in this case not least, women are divided into three categories: (1) the "frivolous, vapid, and soulless," who—like their male counterparts—are to be blackmailed and enslaved; (2) the gifted and devoted, but as yet uncommitted, who must be driven into making extreme and compromising declarations, resulting in the destruction of most of them and the recruitment of a few; and (3) the women who are "with us completely," who constitute "our most valuable treasure."

Nechaev's other great concern that summer was with the sinew of revolution: money. He tried to raise some back in Russia through the mails, but his principal target was the so-called Bakhmetev Fund. Amounting to some eight hundred pounds, the fund had been left with Herzen and Ogarëv, about eleven years before, by an eccentric landowner named P. A. Bakhmetev, who then proceeded to the Marquesas Islands to found a utopian community and was never heard of again. With his keen sense of the value of money, Herzen had used only the interest to finance his various enterprises, so the capital was still intact. When Herzen arrived in Geneva in May 1869, he found himself the target of a concerted campaign to pry the money loose. Bakunin (whom Herzen regarded as utterly irresponsible) and Nechaev wisely remained in the background; Herzen was unable to resist the importunities of Ogarëv, who after all was as much entitled to the money as he was. The upshot was that the eight

hundred pounds was divided, and half of it rapidly came into the possession of Bakunin and Nechaev through Ogarëv's intermediary. Herzen had heard a good deal about Nechaev and disliked all he had heard; the only recorded meeting between the two of them took place when Nechaev came to pick up the check. It was a brief encounter between two people who might well stand for the polarities of the Russian revolutionary movement.

Armed with several hundred pounds, the *Catechism*, the first number of the *People's Vengeance*, and sundry proclamations, Nechaev returned to Russia in late August, via Bucharest, where he acquired a Serbian passport from a Bulgarian revolutionary acquaintance. He did not go to St. Petersburg, where he was sure to have some explaining to do, but to Moscow. The first person he looked up there was Pëtr Uspensky, whom he had visited on his way out of Russia the previous March.

The twenty-two-year-old Uspensky was ripe for Nechaev. Married to the sister of Vera Zasulich, he had drifted on the fringes of Moscow radicalism for at least four years. He had known Ishutin; subsequently he had been associated with German Lopatin and Feliks Volkhovsky in their Ruble Society, a small and informal organization devoted to studying the *narod* and its revolutionary potential soberly and systematically before creating the most sophisticated and finely honed propaganda. Prior to his arrest, Khudiakov had entrusted his manuscripts to Lopatin, and a good deal of his material was used by Ruble Society propagandists. Lopatin was a man of considerable intellectual sobriety while being, at the same time, a great devotee of secret missions and daring risks; he was the crucial figure in the unmasking of Nechaev. Volkhovsky had reacted coldly to Nechaev's plans even before his flight abroad. However, one of the letters that Nechaev had sent off from Switzerland the previous March had led to the arrest of Lopatin, Volkhovsky, and most of their group—including Uspensky's fifteen-year-old sister, but mysteriously leaving Uspensky himself at liberty.

Thus the cooler heads, who might have been able to temper Uspensky's romantic credulousness, were not on the scene when Nechaev arrived. Uspensky had a deep and personal sympathy

for the sufferings of the Russian people, as well as an adolescent attraction to the trappings of conspiracy and "the poetry of struggle." He was also half out of his mind with worry about his sister, who had been sitting for several months in the Fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, accused of being a "dangerous conspirator." There was no indication what disposition the government intended to make of her case, or when.³²

At the time of Nechaev's arrival, Uspensky was employed in Aleksandr Cherkesov's bookstore, something of a radical hang-out. As his visitor knew, Uspensky was well connected, and soon "Pavlov"* (as Nechaev was calling himself) had been introduced to a circle of radical students at the Petrovsky Agricultural Academy, where Ishutin's influence had been considerable. It was in large part from their ranks that Nechaev recruited his first and only real organization, the People's Vengeance.

The leading spirits in the Petrovsky Academy circle seem to have been Nikolai Dolgov and Ivan Ivanov. Aleksei Kuznetsov and Fëdor Ripman were also adherents; they were, it seems, among the more gifted and influential students in the school. Nechaev employed all his wiles and techniques of mystification on these kids; and, like nearly everyone else, they were immensely impressed by his "energy."³³ He spoke in knowledgeable terms about the sufferings of the people, and gave them to understand that he had just returned from tramping all over Russia on foot. He seemed to sleep only two or three hours a night and was frequently (and mysteriously) absent on unspecified errands. To establish his credentials on the inclinations and mood of the *narod*, he told them that he had been a worker until his seventeenth year. This seems also to have been the period when "Pavlov" built up his personal legend: he had been illiterate until he was sixteen; now he could quote Kant in German!

Above all, he was concerned to tell his young adherents what a towering figure Sergei Nechaev was. He gave them copies of the first number of the *People's Vengeance* (which he had brought with him from Switzerland), and he showed them Oga-

*Among his other aliases were "the Baron," "Barsov," "Volkov," "Nikolaev," "Liders," "Karazhdanov," and "Neville."

rëv's poem about Nechaev's heartbreaking death in Siberia. Of course it wasn't long before they began to suspect . . . could it be that Pavlov and Nechaev were one and the same? But this was only a guess, and he continued to be known by his aliases.

Soon Nechaev proceeded to the work of organization; February 19, 1870, after all, was now not far away. He showed Uspensky the document, signed by Bakunin, enrolling him in the World Revolutionary Alliance, and also explained that the Committee had sent him to Moscow to overcome the city's traditional conservatism and whip the local chapter of the People's Vengeance into shape. At first the students were putty in his hands. He exploited their guilt and sense of inferiority to "the people," explaining that only those drawn from the people could work among them, but there were important auxiliary tasks for them. He ridiculed the hopes that Dolgov and Ivanov had for cooperatives, pointing out that the government would never allow them to organize and propagandize for any length of time. When they doubted that a rising would inevitably occur, he reminded them that he was "a worker," that he knew the people. For these young men, the *narod* existed only in mythic terms: as wielders of the ax or embodiments of justice and communality. Their objections were all the more quickly abandoned when Nechaev reminded them that after all there were only two sides: you were either for the people or against them. The threat grew in specificity: the People's Vengeance had its eye on them; the Committee was watching the situation in Moscow!

And so the organization grew, no one can now say how large.* Each of the inner circle received a number, according to the plan in the first part of the *Catechism*, and then the circle that he created was given a double-digit number: those who were members of No. 2's circle were numbered 21 through 26. And so on.

Soon after his arrival in Moscow, Nechaev made the acquaintance of one of the oddest, most eccentric and touching figures

*The only estimate by a participant was Kuznetsov's figure of four hundred, which almost all students of Nechaev regard as a highly inflated figure. See Arthur Lehning, ed., *Michel Bakounine et ses relations avec Sergej Nečâev, 1870-72, Écrits et matériaux* (Leiden, 1971), p. xvii.

in the history of Russian radicalism: Ivan Gavrilovich Pryzhov. This remarkable person was financially on his uppers and spent a great deal of his time hanging around Cherkesov's bookstore, where he had come to know Uspensky and through him Nechaev. In considering the life and works of Pryzhov, we confront Russian life at perhaps its most painful. He certainly belongs to those people whom Dostoevsky called "the insulted and the injured."³⁴

Pryzhov's lifelong inability to fit in anywhere was rooted in the circumstances of his family, which had been for many generations serfs of the prominent Stolypin family (from whom was to come the last impressive statesman of Imperial Russia, Pëtr Arkad'evich). But Ivan Pryzhov's father had been manumitted by his owner and served for forty-three years as a medical clerk at the Marinskaia Hospital in Moscow, an institution for the indigent (where Dostoevsky's father was a physician). For his long years of faithful service in this dreary place, Gavriil Pryzhov was given, at his retirement in 1856, the right to be inscribed as a member of the nobility, although he seems not to have availed himself of the opportunity. He was thus one of the very few Russians ever to have moved in a single generation from the enserfed peasantry to what was—technically, at least—noble status.

Thus Ivan Gavrilovich, born in 1827, was a curiosity in this highly structured society, as Iakushkin was in a different way. Where did he belong? He was neither of the people nor a part of *obshchestvo*. One cannot but think that the confusion about his circumstances added passion to his subsequent identification with the *narod*.

The Marinskaia Hospital was a gloomy place—located, for good measure, next to a lunatic asylum. It is hard not to account in part for Pryzhov's character by his early proximity to poverty, illness, and insanity. In any case, the boy grew up solitary, dreadfully shy, and withdrawn; he was, by his own account, a "terrible stutterer." And as is often true with such children, he became a great reader. Pryzhov finished the Moscow gymnasium in 1848; his high academic achievement conferred on him the right to attend the university without taking entrance examinations. But

at this point he had a (somehow characteristic) piece of bad luck. He wanted to enroll in the faculty of the humanities at Moscow, but in the panic that followed the outbreak of revolution in Europe, Nicholas I had ordered the number of students cut back and demanded a hard scrutiny of all who were not the sons of gentry or high officials. Pryzhov was rejected. In order to attend the university, he hit upon the expedient of enrolling in the medical faculty, where the social diversity of the student body was much greater, and there he was accepted.

Despite—or perhaps because of—his early association with the Marinskaia Hospital, Pryzhov had no interest in the sciences or medicine, and in 1850 he was expelled, apparently for academic negligence. In a sense, however, he never left the university. Like many another bohemian rebel and radical, there was no other place where he could feel so at home. And so he stayed and continued his education without official sanction, using the library, listening to lectures, and deriving what social life he had from the university community. He knew several members of Rybnikov's circle, but not Rybnikov himself. He heard with appreciation and profit the lectures of F. I. Buslaev, the Russian adept of the Brothers Grimm; he nurtured his interest in the Ukraine with O. M. Bodiatsky; but his real hero was Timofei Granovsky, the liberal Hegelian historian, who must have been personally kind to Pryzhov—it is difficult to see much of his intellectual influence on the young man.

Between 1852 and 1866, Pryzhov also worked as a functionary in the Moscow civil court to support himself. In 1866 he lost this post, apparently as a result of the legal reforms, and from that point his financial situation, which had always been precarious, steadily worsened. He had long been a heavy drinker, but now he certainly became an alcoholic. Even in the 1850s he did some drinking on the job, and, as he himself later described it, ended most days in his "favorite tavern in the intimate companionship of Bacchus." Much of the research for his best-known work, *The History of Taverns in Russia*, was undoubtedly done on the spot. Pryzhov spent a great deal of time wandering through the semi-criminal underworld of greater Moscow, participating in its ac-

tivities in a relatively harmless way, but observing what went on and noting it down. He did not so much "write" his articles and small books as select material from his growing storehouse, jotted down on scraps of paper, often greasy and torn, and splice together an article to sell. It was all one book, really: the real life of the Russian people.

A partial exception to this, perhaps, was the work on taverns ("bars" certainly conveys the flavor better to an American audience), which was really an ambitious study of the rebellious and criminal world that centered on the *kabak*. He was interested in just what people drank, in the variety of deaths from alcoholism and other ailments, and in classifying the kinds of crime that emanated from the tavern. Toward the end of his life he evolved the rather contemporary-sounding notion that the tavern in Russia was in fact a revolutionary milieu; one could make a better case for the opposite proposition. The published *History of Taverns* was only the first third of his work; no publisher would touch the subsequent sections, which dealt more with the milieu of the tavern, although the head of the Moscow University Press was reported to have been interested. Pryzhov burned the rest of his material on the eve of his arrest.

Franco Venturi describes Pryzhov as having "drawn his Populism from a Slavophil source."³⁵ There is no evidence for such a "source," and it would be more accurate to describe his views as a demonization of Slavophilism. He was fascinated by the ritual of the Orthodox Church and used to conduct his drinking bouts in a kind of parody of sacerdotal ritual. He seems to have hated the Church with a devouring passion, and to have wished to reveal the poisonous religiosity at the heart of Russian culture and Russian life. He was fascinated by Russia's Holy Fools and connected their visionary seizures with epilepsy, another of his interests.

He entertained many grand intellectual designs—the history of serfdom, the history of liberty in Russia—that were never even partially realized. He was often hungry and penniless and was sometimes fed by the working people in whom he was so inter-

ested. In 1865 he had typhus, but that was only the most severe of his many illnesses.

Pryzhov's personal relations are also somewhat mysterious. He was married, but his wife is a shadowy and remote figure in his life; her sympathy for his activities and point of view must have been limited. It is similarly difficult to discern much trace of close friendships. Pryzhov's deliberately cultivated eccentricities, his becoming a "character," must (as with Iakushkin, whom he strikingly resembles) have begun as a response to his shyness. This is also suggested by his relationship to dogs, which has occasioned much interest and some amusement among historians who have written about him.³⁶ It is not too much to say that he identified himself pathetically with dogs, particularly with dogs that had been beaten, chained up, and otherwise abused.³⁷ Pryzhov began his deposition to the court (known as his "Confession") by stating that his "whole life had been a dog's life"; at the end he saw Nechaev as having caused him to "die like a dog."

Pryzhov received two hundred fifty rubles for the sale of *The History of Taverns in Russia*, but more than half went to pay debts. Early 1868 found him desperately trying to sell the publishers another of his major projects, *The Dog in the History of Human Belief*. But on this occasion his difficulties were not produced (as they so often had been) by political censorship.

Out of work since 1866, Pryzhov sank further and further into vagrancy and alcoholism. He tried to drown himself in a pond (with his dog, Leporello), but both were dragged out. He worked briefly for a private railroad company (the revolutionary potentialities of the railroad charmed him initially), but he was by now apparently incapable of holding a job. He spent most of his time drinking and talking with railroad workers, who also helped feed him. The sale of his library in 1869, which brought him to Cherkesov's bookstore, was a final desperate expedient.

How rapidly was Pryzhov recruited? The answer appears to be that Nechaev quickly decided that Pryzhov could be useful, and

Pryzhov did not hold out long against him. He was desperate, angrier at the world than he had ever been, ready to take some "action" if he could. Nechaev appears to have convinced Pryzhov that they had a special bond, since they were both men of the people.³⁸ Nechaev's hatred of the old order must have gratified Pryzhov even as—perhaps—it frightened him. Pryzhov had connections among lower-level officialdom; he could (and did) write proclamations to Ukrainians in their native language; but above all, he had an unequalled knowledge of Moscow low life, and Nechaev intended to exploit the semicriminal underworld if he could.

Soon Pryzhov had his own group of five, several of whom had been expelled in October from the University of Moscow in another of the many faculty-student confrontations that had played such an important part in radicalizing Russia's students over the preceding fifteen years. Fëdor Ripman was assigned to Pryzhov's group, as he didn't know much about the *narod* (he subsequently told the court) and wanted to learn. Pryzhov sent Ripman off to a likely location, the Khitrov Market, a dreadful slum that was also a center of petty crime and criminals. There Ripman struck up an acquaintance with a few pickpockets and prostitutes—with some difficulty, for he made it a matter of principle that the men and women of the people should inaugurate the conversations. After a while, a sympathetic prostitute warned him that some of the men were planning to rob him. On another occasion, one of the thieves asked him if he knew a place where "you could rip something off."

Ripman was supposed to find out the secrets of influential men from the whores they patronized; it doesn't appear that he was the man for the job. Nor did he have much more success in a rural setting. For a time he served as tutor to a peasant named Dmitry Makarov, to whom he sang revolutionary songs and with whom he had conversations based on suggestive biblical themes, such as loving one's neighbor as oneself. In his court testimony, Ripman no doubt minimized these contacts and made them seem as harmless as possible, but his naiveté was not counterfeit. At his trial, he still professed to believe in the Committee, of which he

stood in great awe, since "Nechaev could not have done all that by himself."³⁹

Despite Nechaev's dislike of theoretical discussion, his groups inevitably spent a good deal of time going over the pamphlet literature and proclamations that comprised the harvest of the previous summer. Recruitment also proceeded apace, in the characteristic Nechaevist atmosphere of mystification, fraud, and intimidation. Ivan Likhutin, a student at the Medical-Surgical Academy in St. Petersburg, made a trip to Moscow, during which he posed as an "agent of the international society," allegedly come to check on how things were going.⁴⁰ Nikolai Nikolaev, a very young man from Ivanovo, "slavishly devoted" to Nechaev (Vera Zasulich's phrase), often played the role of an anonymous representative of the Committee. A certain number of students learned, in a confused and distorted fashion, of the existence of the First International, which (Nechaev told them) had enrolled millions of workers and was led by a "more intimate circle" concerned with concrete political tasks—such as the upcoming Russian revolution. Many students succumbed completely to these visions, particularly those who, like Aleksei Kuznetsov, were just at the point of disillusion with the Emperor Alexander's reforms.⁴¹

Money continued to be a major problem. The members themselves contributed; Kuznetsov, who was a person of some means, donated two hundred seventy-five rubles, but few others were in a position to do likewise. People's Vengeance letterheads and membership cards were printed, partly to impress potential donors, but not very much came of the solicitations.

The search for funds was the occasion for one of the most grotesque episodes of the autumn, generally described as the "affair of the *veksel*" [promissory note].⁴² Andrei Kolachevsky was a well-to-do young man whom Nechaev and several others (including Ivan and Vladimir Likhutin, their sister, Ekaterina, and Prokhor Debogorii-Mokrievich) decided to blackmail. They evolved the following puerile and theatrical scheme (did Nechaev's early success as an actor prompt him to choose this method?). Ivan Likhutin visited Kolachevsky (the kind of liberal

fellow traveler Nechaev hated most) and left a copy of Nechaev's *Revolutionary Catechism* in his possession. A short while later, Kolachevsky was picked up in the street by Vladimir Likhutin and a friend, disguised in false beards and wigs and representing themselves as police officers. Together with Debogorii-Mokrievich, who sat in the rented carriage, they then drove Kolachevsky to a nearby hotel where they put the bite on him: either he could pay them six thousand rubles or they would "prosecute." Naturally he chose to pay, and gave his blackmailers a promissory note for the amount they wanted. Subsequently, Kolachevsky discovered what had happened and refused to honor the note. Confused reports of the attempted extortion soon began to circulate, and increased the (not very effective) opposition to Nechaev among some radicals in Moscow and particularly back in St. Petersburg. Had Nechaev's organization lasted longer, the affair of the *veksel'* might have proved seriously embarrassing.

It may also have been money that led to the murder of Ivan Ivanov, the abrupt end of the People's Vengeance, and the flight of Nechaev. The whole story of the developing hostility between Ivanov and Nechaev will never be known, but it is clear that Ivanov became more and more skeptical about Nechaev personally and about the mysterious Committee that always supported Nechaev in the event of controversy. It may be that a specific disagreement over whether to leaflet the Petrovsky Agricultural Academy (which was Ivanov's particular responsibility) was a key event.⁴³ But German Lopatin subsequently set himself the task of finding out what had really gone on, with an eye to exposing Nechaev and ending his influence on Russian radicals, both at home and in the emigration. This is his reconstruction of what happened:

Ivanov was well off (perhaps even rich), and had supplied Nechaev with money on more than one occasion. Towards the end he began to have doubts that the money was being put to the right use. One day he said to N[echaev]: "this is the last time I'm giving you any money. You know I am ready to give all I have to the 'cause,' but here I must lay down two conditions: (1.) that the person to whom I am to

give the money inspires me with more confidence than you do; (2.) that I have some kind of guarantee that the person himself knows where the money is going and is not merely a blind tool in someone else's hands."⁴⁴

Whatever the nature and sequence of events leading to the estrangement of the two, by mid-November Nechaev had decided that Ivanov had to be eliminated. It is possible that the decision was provoked by Ivanov's having threatened to leave the People's Vengeance altogether. It is even possible (though highly unlikely) that Nechaev feared a denunciation to the police.*

On Sunday, November 16, Nechaev called together Uspensky, Pryzhov, Nikolaev, and Kuznetsov, and told them he had decided to kill Ivanov.⁴⁵ In Nechaev's compelling presence, they all agreed to participate, although they were all (except the doughty Nikolaev) reluctant. When Pryzhov said that he couldn't see in the dark and had hurt his leg, Nechaev replied that if necessary they would carry him.

On November 21, Ivanov was lured to an out-of-the-way part of the grounds of the Petrovsky Academy on the pretext that a printing press had been discovered there⁴⁶ and the group had to decide what should be done with it. The meeting place was a ruined grotto, near a pond. There, in the late afternoon, Ivanov was strangled, then shot through the head (by Nechaev); his body was thrown into the pond, where it was discovered four days later. None of Nechaev's helpers displayed much sangfroid, and

*In *The Possessed*, Dostoevsky attributed the murder of Shatov (Ivanov) to Verkhovensky's (Nechaev's) desire to bind the members of his group to him body and soul. There is no suggestion of any such motivation among the principals. But in early March 1870, Georgy Enisherlov, a student at the Technological Institute in St. Petersburg who had been involved in the student disorders, attributed precisely this motive to Nechaev, basing the charge on conversations the two had allegedly had. Enisherlov, however, is anything but a reliable witness. So great was his detestation of Nechaev that he told the police he wanted to go abroad, find Nechaev, and "kill him like a dog"; he guaranteed the government he would return if he was unsuccessful. See B. P. Koz'min, *Nechaev i nechaevtsy* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1931), pp. 142-43. The recent discovery of Enisherlov's student diaries throws some light on the matter. Although he later became a moderate constitutionalist, Enisherlov was a very cynical and pessimistic young man in 1868-69; he claims in the diaries that Nechaev stole his ideas and even some phrases for *The Revolutionary Catechism*! See N. Pirumova, "M. Bakunin ili S. Nechaev," *Prometei*, No. 5 (1968), pp. 177-81.

Pryzhov in particular was in a pitiable condition. He had not been able to confront the dreadful project in a sober state, so he made a long stop in a tavern along the way, which delayed matters considerably. Subsequently, at Kuznetsov's apartment, with water and blood all over the floor, Nechaev suddenly sent a bullet close by Pryzhov's head and jokingly (?) suggested that if the shot had killed him, he could have taken the blame for the whole business. After his arrest, Pryzhov had a nervous breakdown. Nechaev suffered a severe flesh wound on his hand, where Ivanov had bitten him during the melee. He was in high spirits. On the following day, he and Kuznetsov left for St. Petersburg. "You're now a doomed man," said Nechaev to Kuznetsov, quoting from the *Catechism*.⁴⁷ (The historian longs for a film of this incident. Was Nechaev smiling?)

The discovery of Ivanov's body quickly brought the political police into the case. On November 26, still not really knowing what was going on, they made a search of Uspensky's apartment, where they turned up a good deal of illegal literature and, extraordinarily, a long list of names. Further searches of Cherkesov's bookstore and other people's apartments turned up more and more; finally, on February 11, the printing press was discovered, hidden in the wall between the bookstore and the building next door. Within hours of the initial discovery of the names in Uspensky's apartment, the dragnet was out. Nikolaev, Pryzhov, and Uspensky were quickly arrested; Kuznetsov was apprehended in St. Petersburg in early December. In all, 152 people were picked up on charges of involvement with Nechaev; of these, 79 were actually tried.⁴⁸ The four principals received lengthy sentences (between seven and fifteen years) at hard labor, to be followed by exile for life to Siberia. Uspensky eventually hanged himself in prison, after some of his followers (unjustly) accused him of being a police spy. Of the four, only Kuznetsov continued his radical activity after the expiration of his sentence.

But Nechaev had slipped through the fingers of the police again. He had gone to St. Petersburg, apparently in the hope of continuing to build up the People's Vengeance. But to do so was

impossible after the wave of arrests began. It may also be that he encountered determined opposition there from the moment of his arrival. Mikhail Negreskul, the son-in-law of Pëtr Lavrov, and Mark Natanson, who was to become prominent in the revolutionary movement of the 1870s, were only two of the radicals of the capital who were working to counteract his influence.⁴⁹ Nechaev apparently returned quickly to Moscow, and from there went south to Tula, whence, in the company of Varvara Aleksandrovskaiia, a thirty-six-year-old radical groupie of unstable disposition,* he made his way abroad.

Aleksandrovskaiia's subsequent depositions to the police⁵⁰ make it quite clear that the romance of her flight abroad with Nechaev was not merely political. But she was disappointed on all counts. Upon their arrival in Geneva, she was shunted from place to place and generally neglected. She met "some old man" (it was Ogarëv) who asked her vaguely how things were in Russia. Within a few days, Nechaev informed her that it was now time to go back. She was given a quantity of new proclamations and told to deliver them to two students at the Petrovsky Agricultural Academy in Moscow. There was also material addressed to Mark Natanson and others of Nechaev's enemies. On January 11, she was arrested at the frontier. It is entirely possible, as the eminent Soviet historian B. P. Koz'min has suggested,⁵¹ that Nechaev connived at her arrest in order to damage Natanson; her depositions to the government are not edifying. She renewed her offer to work against the revolutionary movement, suggesting that she lure Nechaev to Dresden, where he might be picked up by government agents. Her accounts of her relationship with Nechaev contain striking references to her self-abasement before him, and her entrapment scheme has a nasty overtone of sexual revenge.⁵²

Confused reports of Ivanov's murder were already current in Geneva when on January 9 Bakunin learned that Nechaev had

*Aleksandrovskaiia (of gentry background and married to a St. Petersburg customs official) was arrested in 1862 for disseminating radical propaganda. After spending several months in prison, she was exiled to Tula. After Karakozov's attempt, she volunteered her services to the government in the struggle against the revolutionary movement.

escaped. He was awaiting, he wrote to Ogarëv, "our Boy."⁵³ Immediately upon his arrival in Switzerland, Nechaev, together with Bakunin and Ogarëv, plunged into the work of drafting more proclamations, calling upon all strata of Russian society to involve themselves in the coming insurrection, now only a few months away.⁵⁴ At the same time, Nechaev, who knew that the Russian government would attempt to extradite him, set to work mobilizing the French, German, and—above all—the Swiss Left to put pressure on the Swiss government to resist the Russian efforts. A considerable campaign was mounted, and so great was the abhorrence of the Russian government by all European radicals that even some who had become thoroughly disquieted by what they were discovering about Nechaev's methods lent their names to the antiextradition campaign. The crucial issue was whether the murder of Ivanov was a political crime or not. If, as the Russian government claimed, it was *not*, then Nechaev could be extradited as an ordinary criminal. To rally his potential supporters and bolster the political interpretation, Nechaev represented himself in the radical press as the object of assassination attempts by the Third Section.

The only segment of the radical political spectrum that was unswervingly hostile to Nechaev was the Marxian one. Ironically enough, Marx's associates and disciples wanted to get Nechaev largely because by exposing his dirty tricks they could strike a blow against Bakunin, whose quarrel with Marx was soon to destroy the First International.

Unless he had done them an injury, most radicals were reluctant to condemn Nechaev publicly, perhaps because they had an accurate (but generally unarticulated) sense that what separated Nechaev from themselves was no matter of principle but determination to go *all the way*; there was a lot of talk about "giving oneself over utterly to the cause," but Nechaev was revealing new meanings in this by-now-hackneyed phrase. The Swiss and in particular the Russian radicals were also understandably reluctant to do anything that might play into the hands of the Russian government. But the struggle between Marx and Bakunin within the International freed the Marxists to make the most of the

grotesque and squalid material that lay amply to hand. They concentrated their fire on two issues—both minor, but both revelatory of Nechaev's style.

The first had its origins in the summer of 1869. At that time, Mikhail Negreskul had, like Nechaev, been in Switzerland. There he encountered Charles Perron, a veteran Swiss radical. Perron deplored to him the fact that Bakunin, the great freedom-fighter, was living in penury and asked the young Russian if something could be done. Negreskul was willing to try, and through his agency it was arranged that Bakunin should translate the first volume of Marx's *Das Kapital* into Russian for a Petersburg publishing house.* Grappling with Marx's "economic metaphysics" (Bakunin's term) proved increasingly burdensome, however, and by the time that Nechaev arrived back in Switzerland, Bakunin was heartily sick of the job and eager to abandon it in favor of promoting the Russian revolution and preventing the extradition of "Boy." Nechaev told Bakunin that he would arrange things; without telling Bakunin what he was doing, he wrote a letter to Nikolai Liubavin, who had arranged matters for Negreskul with the publisher, saying that if he didn't stop annoying Bakunin, the People's Vengeance would deal with him. To make the affair even more unsavory, Bakunin had accepted a three-hundred-ruble advance, which he was now quite unable to pay back, even had he been willing to do so. Marx made effective if rather unscrupulous use of this episode at the Hague Congress of the International.⁵⁵

The second case that was employed to discredit Bakunin and his allies was Nechaev's renewed assault on the depleted resources of the Bakhmetev Fund. The opportunity was provided by the death of Herzen on January 21, 1870. While he lived, the fund was inaccessible, but following his death, Tuchkova-Ogarëva and Herzen's son decided to give the remainder of the money to Bakunin and Ogarëv; Nechaev ended up with most of it. Marx subsequently circulated a garbled account of the affair,

*The edition appeared at the end of March 1872, translated in the event by Lopatin and N. F. Daniel'son. With their customary penetration, the Russian censors allowed the volume to appear, apparently because they thought that such a long, dry book could do no great harm!

alleging that Bakunin had gotten hold of various monies belonging to Herzen that he was using for his own disreputable purposes.

Among the works produced by Nechaev during the first frenetic months of 1870 was the second number of the *Editions of the Society of the People's Vengeance*.⁵⁶ After defending the elimination of Ivanov as necessary for "the cause," Nechaev went on to expound his postrevolutionary vision in a short article entitled "The Principal Foundations of the Future Social Order." Although Nechaev made specific and approving reference to the *Communist Manifesto*, the dominant notes he struck were Jacobin: the Committee was to oversee the revolutionary process from beginning to end. Although the vast majority of the population in the postrevolutionary period would live in rural or industrial co-ops and artels, the regulation of the economy and its new structure would still be in the hands of the Committee. From his references to communal kitchens and dormitories, it is clear that Nechaev envisioned collectivism on a most ambitious scale (however cursory his formulations); and here, too, the Committee would be both organizer and enforcer.⁵⁷

The principal drama of the spring, however, concerns Nechaev's relations with Alexander Herzen's daughter, Natal'ia (known as "Tata"), and with Bakunin himself. Nechaev's efforts to cajole, seduce, and finally threaten Tata into political cooperation—for her name and family connection were valuable—led, on Bakunin's part, to some unease, which was increased by his gradual (and unwilling) recognition of the profoundly authoritarian and statist nature of Nechaev's communism. Nechaev's initial objective was the resurrection of Herzen's *Bell*, six unsatisfactory issues of which did appear in April and May, financed by the greater part of the Bakhmetev money. Then, in May and June, German Lopatin entered the scene once more, armed with evidence that even Bakunin could not ignore about the murder of Ivanov, the invention of revolutionary organizations, and, above all, the double-dealing, intimidation, and blackmail—not merely of liberal dupes but of "comrades," like Bakunin himself. And what Lopatin related to Bakunin, coldly and correctly, was all the

harder to deny, as the "Yids and Germans" around Marx were making such excellent use of Bakunin's relationship with Nechaev to destroy the old man politically.

Nechaev approached Tata Herzen in the same way that he had worked so successfully on other members of privilege Russia: through mystification, the projection of "energy," but above all by preying on what one must anachronistically call "liberal guilt." Initially, he made considerable headway, the more so as she was, in the aftermath of her father's death, eager to do something for his cause and quite aware that she had never really acted on the family convictions. But she had a strong strain of common sense that enabled her to see through Nechaev more easily than Bakunin had; furthermore, she had no comparable psychological investment in "Young Russia" and an imminent insurrection. She was quite put off by Nechaev's insistence that the end justified the means and horrified by talk of the necessity of blackmail. What really did the trick, however, was probably Nechaev's rather passionless declarations of love; Tata Herzen was uncomfortably conscious of being an heiress and had rejected admirers more convincing in their declarations than Nechaev because she suspected that their motives were financial.⁵⁸

For Bakunin the struggle was far more desperate, not only because the personal bond was so deep (his letters in this period describe Nechaev as being "virginally pure," "filled with love," and other incongruous phrases) but because a break meant the abandonment of his current vision of the Russian revolution and his place in it, which had become profoundly important to him.

In a fashion at once touching and macabre, Bakunin tried, in his letters to Ogarëv and Tata Herzen, to understand—almost to justify—a manipulative authoritarianism that was repugnant to his deepest convictions. Bakunin's anarchism and belief in federations of communes was striking even among Russian Populists; his conception of Russia's future was closer to that of Shchapov than to Nechaev's "barracks communism." Almost a month after his first conversation with Lopatin, he addressed a "collective message" to Ogarëv, Tata, and others in which he cautioned them against "taking too unfavorable a view of our friend the

Baron [Nechaev].” He accepted Nechaev’s notion that Russian youth was “a corrupt and inane herd of jabbering doctrinaires,”⁵⁹ and in another place amplified this view, not exactly accepting it or its consequences, but suggesting that any serious revolutionary might be tempted by it:

Our youth is too corrupt and flaccid [runs Bakunin’s paraphrase of Nechaev’s opinion] to be trusted to form an organization by force of persuasion alone—but since an organization is essential, and since these young people are incapable of uniting and unwilling to unite freely, they must be united involuntarily and unawares—and in order that this organization, half-founded on coercion and deceit, should not crumble, they must be confounded and compromised to such an extent that it becomes impossible for them to withdraw.⁶⁰

A few pages later, Bakunin summed up many of the factors that tempted Nechaev (and how many others!) to the Jacobin alternative in the following cogent words:

[Nechaev] saw with despair . . . the historical backwardness, the apathy, the inarticulateness, the infinite patience and the sluggishness of our Orthodox people, who could, if they realized and so desired, sink this entire ship of state with one wave of their mighty hand, but who appear still to be sleeping the sleep of the dead.⁶¹

And so, as late as mid-June 1870, Bakunin could not face a complete break with Nechaev and instead presented him with a set of “conditions” for continued collaboration. Bakunin still could not believe that Nechaev was in any sense *vicious*, since he tended to see all vices as deriving from the characteristically bourgeois sins of corruption and self-interestedness.

It is quite conceivable that Bakunin might have continued to deluge his friends (and Nechaev) with mammoth letters and programmatic statements for months, but Nechaev, as we know, had a low tolerance for these intelligentsia games. Early in July, he came out of hiding and paid Bakunin and Ogarëv a brief visit in Geneva. Having already decided, perhaps, that there was little to keep him in Switzerland, he then left for London, taking with him a number of letters and other documents he had stolen from

Bakunin and the Herzen family. By so doing, he helped Bakunin finally to act with some consistency. On July 24, the old revolutionary wrote the following cautionary lines to a Swiss friend, to whom, a few short months before, he had given Nechaev a fulsome introduction:

If you introduce him to a friend, his first task will be to sow discord, gossip, intrigue between you—in a word, to set you at loggerheads. If your friend has a wife, a daughter, he will try to seduce her, to give her a child to tear her away from the official morality and plunge her forcibly into revolutionary protest against society. They regard any personal attachment, any friendship, any *intimacy* as an evil which it is their duty to destroy, because all of it constitutes a power which, existing as it does independently of the secret organization, diminishes the unique power of the latter.⁶²

The letter had its effect; late in the summer, Nechaev wrote angrily from London to Bakunin and Ogarëv about the damage to him that this and similar letters had done; they had given him, he wrote unexpectedly, “the kiss of Judas.”

While in London, Nechaev produced his final publication: a slim brochure that he called *Commune (Obshchina)*. Despite his interest in the *Communist Manifesto*, he was contemptuous of the lack of revolutionary spirit exhibited by the First International; at the same time, he published an “open letter” to Bakunin and Ogarëv, a document that for its shrewdness and generational viewpoint deserves quotation:

I am taking advantage of this opportunity to tell you that despite our differences about political ends and means—differences which became apparent when we were confronted with practical affairs which demanded not only theoretical radicalism but also resoluteness in action—I, while renouncing from now on all political solidarity with you, nevertheless continue to regard you as the best representatives of a generation—a generation which is unfortunately departing the stage of history without leaving a trace. The ideas of your generation, gentlemen, not having any roots in your life and situation, received from without and cut off from your material condition—although for this reason you could never realize these ideas in practice, they have nevertheless saved you to some extent from that slime and filth into

which your contemporaries and schoolmates have sunk. . . . Your social convictions have prevented you from becoming proponents of the accursed state structure of the present day, but they have been so little felt by the generation which has come from a non-popular milieu that they have not made anyone a real enemy of that state; because the contradiction between the revolutionary thought and an aristocratic life led to a dismal skepticism and a fruitless disappointment even in such strong minds as the mind of A. Herzen.

All that could be of use in this generation has found its expression in the brilliant literary works of the late editor of the *Bell* and in yours.⁶³

We know little of Nechaev's movements during his last two years of liberty. He was in Paris during the Prussian siege of the final months of 1870; by the spring of 1871 he had returned to Switzerland. He stayed for a time with M. P. Sazhin (Arman Ross), in those days an associate of Bakunin, in Zurich. They discussed the situation in Paris and politics in general. Although Nechaev tried for a time to convince Sazhin that he was part of a continuing revolutionary network, he soon gave up and admitted his complete isolation.⁶⁴ He worked for a time in Zurich as a sign painter—his old trade—toiling from six in the morning until six in the evening.

In the summer of 1871, with the major protagonist still at large, the trial of his dupes, disciples, and victims, sometimes known as the "Trial of the Eighty-seven," took place under the new legal order introduced by Alexander's reforms. Many conservative figures in the police and other government departments were uncertain about the new format: public proceedings, defense attorneys, and so on. In addition, the drama of the Paris Commune and the possible contacts between participants and some of the accused provided a largely specious link between the two events, which further increased the nervousness of conservative circles. The minister of justice and other high government officials hoped that the public revelation of Nechaev's villainy would have a cautionary effect on the country's radical youth. But everything seemed to go wrong at the trial. The large number of defendants (some of whom had merely received proclamations

through the mail), the complexity of Nechaev's involvements, and above all the failure of the government lawyers clearly to separate the murder of Ivanov from minor matters like the distribution of leaflets—all this prevented the trial from becoming the counterrevolutionary morality play that the government had hoped to present to public opinion. In addition, the spectators tended to be young "nihilists," sympathetic to the accused; the "liberal" defense lawyers were far more skillful and daring than those who presented the government's case. The four who had participated directly in the murder received sentences ranging between seven and fifteen years at hard labor (to be followed by exile)—remarkably lenient terms that caused many a conservative to long for the old days when trials were administrative and secret.⁶⁵

But the government succeeded in spite of itself. The trial made an extremely good impression on moderate public opinion. Nikolai Mikhailovsky, covering the proceedings for the radical *Annals of the Fatherland*, found the trial a triumphant vindication of the "new justice." And despite the public sympathy for the defendants evident in the courtroom, there was a substantial movement of radical opinion against Nechaev and his methods, a kind of revulsion that developed steadily in the early 1870s.

Interesting evidence of the shift in radical opinion against "Nechaevism" is provided by the case of several former students at the University of Moscow who had been expelled in the fracas of the fall of 1869 that had added to the membership of the People's Vengeance. They showed up in Zurich in the summer of 1871, while the trial was on; according to Sazhin, only one was interested in meeting Nechaev;* the other three wanted nothing to do with him. But Nechaev, hoping to reconstitute some kind of a group, persuaded several of them to meet with him. His plan, according to Sazhin, was to start a periodical, which was to be financed by blackmailing the Herzen family, using the little archive of compromising material with which Nechaev had left

*Nechaev persuaded Ivan Ponomarev, a future chemistry professor at the University of Kharkov, to sign an oath of allegiance to the Committee. There is an odor of self-parody about the episode. See Lehning, *Michel Bakounine*, p. 366.

Geneva the year before. The scheme did not commend itself either to Sazhin or to the students. And Bakunin got wind of the fact that Sazhin was in touch with Nechaev and threatened to have nothing further to do with him if he did not end the relationship. Which Sazhin did.

Zemfiry Ralli had been close to Nechaev during the student protests in the fall of 1869; indeed, he was probably to have become a member of the Committee. He had been arrested, exiled, and in the fall of 1871 escaped to Switzerland, where he took up residence in Zurich. In the spring of 1872, Nechaev arrived for a visit. Ralli provides a somewhat less flattering description than is usual in the memoir literature: "it was the same young man, with the burning eyes and the brusque gestures, scrawny, small in stature, nervous, biting his fingernails to the quick."⁶⁶ He was reading Robespierre's memoirs and the *Confessions* of Rousseau. Again, Bakunin's intervention led to a quarrel, which ended with Nechaev's departure. During the final weeks before his arrest, he shared quarters with Kaspar Turski, a young Polish revolutionary from a noble family, who had fought for the Paris Commune and was to collaborate closely with Tkachëv on his journal, the *Tocsin*. Turski was as much a believer in revolutionary will as Nechaev, and as much of a Jacobin. The two got on famously.

One day in the late summer of 1872, Nechaev, who had at the time a Serbian passport issued to one Stepan Grazdanov, walked into a small restaurant on the outskirts of Zurich that was frequented by workers and socialists. According to an eyewitness,⁶⁷ he spoke briefly and animatedly with a man at a table, then got up and walked out into the little garden behind the restaurant. In a moment, the door was covered by the local police commissioner, and ten or a dozen men appeared. After a brief scuffle, Nechaev was dragged away, shouting, "Tell the Russians that Grazdanov has been arrested." He had been betrayed by Adolf Stepkowski, a Polish double agent whom he had met through Turski. Several amateurish attempts to rescue him ensued, none of which got off the ground.

On October 9, Nechaev admitted who he was, and to help the

renewed political furor about extradition, claimed that the elimination of Ivanov was both necessary and "a purely political act." But the murder of Ivanov had become notorious, and the Swiss Left was not willing to undertake much on his behalf. On October 26, the Grand Council in Zurich voted 4-3 for extradition, on condition that Nechaev be tried under the regular criminal laws. The following day, he was handed over to the Russian authorities at the Bavarian frontier.*

Nechaev's own trial opened on January 8, 1873, in Moscow District Court. From the outset he denied the right of the tribunal to try him, claiming that he was an émigré and that he had been kidnapped.† After the government had presented an elaborate reconstruction of Ivanov's murder, the jury deliberated only twenty minutes before finding him guilty. He was sentenced to twenty years at hard labor. As he was being taken from the hall, he shouted, "Long live the Assembly! Down with despotism!" There was no doubting his courage or his intransigence, but of course "assemblies" played no role in his thinking. And despotism?

After his trial and condemnation, Nechaev simply disappeared. Subsequently it became known that a decision had been made at the highest level to put Nechaev away in the Alekseisky Ravelin, the grimmest and most impregnable dungeon in the Fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul. The reasons for this violation of legality need no elaboration.

For more than seven years, nothing was known of his whereabouts. Then, in January 1881, the directing body of the People's Will (known as the Executive Committee) received a letter—from Nechaev! Although most of the leadership were at the least dubious about him and his methods, the letter made an enormous impression. Vera Figner, who recounted the episode in her memoirs,⁶⁸ described the communication as completely busi-

*J. J. Pfenninger, the Zurich police chief, received a "substantial reward" from the Russian government for capturing Nechaev and then persuading the Grand Council to extradite him. See Woodford McClellan, "Nechaevshchina: An Unknown Chapter," *Slavic Review* 32:3 (September 1973), p. 547.

†As he was leaving after the first court session, Nechaev shouted, "I have ceased to be a slave of your despot. Long live the National Assembly!" See B. Bazilevsky, *Gosudarstvennyia prestupleniia v Rossii v XIX veke*, Vol. I (Stuttgart, 1903), p. 416.

nesslike and unsentimental. The message: "Free me." Figner's impression was that all his willingness to lie, cheat, and steal, to shed innocent blood, had been purged by his years in the Ravelin. The Executive Committee agreed that he must be freed!

The letter had been brought out of the fortress by a guard whom Nechaev had suborned, and he claimed that more than forty of his jailers and guards were in some way under his influence. No one doubted the figure. Characteristically, Nechaev's plan for his own liberation depended on a complicated mystification: his revolutionary rescuers were to arrive in uniforms, covered with medals, and announce to the guards that a revolution had taken place. Alexander had been replaced on the throne by his son, who had decreed that the prisoner in the Ravelin was to be freed.

Eventually, however, the Executive Committee decided that the rescue would have to wait until Tsar Alexander had been done away with, and Nechaev was so informed.* But after the assassination, the organization of the People's Will was decimated by the police, and the rescue attempt was never made. A precarious contact existed until April 1, when Nechaev's courier was arrested; more than sixty people were eventually tried and punished for involvement with the prisoner. None of the members of the People's Will who ended in the fortress ever saw him, and now there was no one outside to take advantage of his advice: in order to exacerbate the postassassination chaos, an "imperial manifesto" restoring serfdom should be issued and other, similar misinformation spread. Nechaev was now utterly isolated from all other prisoners; the new, strict regime under which he was placed led to his death, apparently from scurvy, on November 21, 1882, thirteen years to the day after the murder of Ivanov.

In later years, a number of the soldiers whose careers Nechaev had ruined encountered various radicals in exile. Their awe, even fear, according to Figner, continued undiminished. At their

*Figner denies the rumor that subsequently gained credence in radical circles that Nechaev himself volunteered to postpone his rescue until after the attempt on the Emperor. The Executive Committee made that decision. The wide acceptance of that story, however, tells us something about the changing attitude toward Nechaev on the Russian Left after 1881.

trial, many had refused to use the name Nechaev, referring to their nemesis only as "he." "Just try and refuse when he orders you to do something!" said one of them.⁶⁹

Of all the responses to Nechaev in general and the murder of Ivanov in particular, Fëdor Dostoevsky's was the most immediate and is probably still the most famous. Dostoevsky was modern (and neurotic) enough to feel Nechaev's power in a deeper and more prophetic fashion than the radicals of the day; his horrified fascination indicates how well he understood, at one level, Nechaev's *appeal*. After his novel *The Possessed* had been published, Dostoevsky confessed in the columns of the right-wing newspaper for which he wrote: "probably I could never have become a Nechaev, but a Nechaevets—for this I couldn't vouch, but maybe I could have become one . . . in the days of my youth."* Dostoevsky was abroad at the time of the murder, and as he followed the unfolding drama of Nechaev's career in the newspapers at the Dresden public library, a new character invaded the pages of his work-in-progress. Known variously as "the student" and "Nechaev," he finally became Pëtr Verkhovensky.

At one level (his "rational egoism"), Verkhovensky owes something to Chernyshevsky, but the combination of Verkhovensky's manic frivolity and genius for sordid intrigue does not really recall any major figure in the revolutionary movement. Dostoevsky himself professed surprise at the "comic" elements in the character. Despite the archetypal quality of Verkhovensky, some real parallels with the historical Nechaev remain: their devotion to "the ax" and their admiring references to the Jesuits; their hatred of theory in itself and their attraction toward conspiratorial action and criminality. Dostoevsky goes so far as to say of his character, Nechaev-in-transition, that he is "not a socialist but a rebel. His ideas are insurrection and destruction, after

*Fëdor Dostoevsky, *The Diary of a Writer*, Vol. I (London and Toronto, 1949), p. 147. Dostoevsky was of course thinking of his radical youth, when he came within a whisker of being executed for his involvement with the Petrashevsky Circle. Was he also thinking of Pryzhov, six years younger than he, whom he had known at least in passing at the Marinskaia Hospital? There is a minor figure in *The Possessed*, a member of Verkhovensky's group, clearly based on Pryzhov.

which 'let happen what will' on the basis of the social principle according to which whatever might come would still be better than the present, and that the time has come to act rather than to preach."⁷⁰ The fit is not exact—one cannot say simply that Nechaev is "not a socialist"—and yet it suggests something that we need to know about how Nechaev put action and belief together. Similarly, Dostoevsky was able to realize how little Nechaev cared for ideas and "discussion"; on the other side, the inveterate discussers who encountered Nechaev were prone to stand in awe of someone who had no time for all that, who was so "energetic."

For all of the traces of the historical Nechaev that may be found in Verkhovensky, however, there is absolutely nothing in Nechaev to suggest a final cynicism about revolution itself. Largely for this reason, Nechaev and Verkhovensky *feel* different. Perhaps this is part of what Dostoevsky meant when he wrote: "I do not know Nechaev, or Ivanov, or the circumstances of this murder." In a prosaic sense, he clearly did "know" a good deal about Nechaev. But Dostoevsky was interested in the revolutionary consequences of atheism. To say that "all is permitted" if God does not exist, however, is not the same as to give a concrete historical rendering of what "all is permitted" might mean in your hometown or your own life. This Dostoevsky was clearly concerned to do in *The Possessed*.

Nechaev also recalls the solipsistic egoism of Max Stirner: he identified the revolution with himself, what he called "the cause" with his person, even in the most squalid attempts at blackmail and revenge on "opponents." He was also "Machiavellian": almost every educated person who came in contact with him had recourse to the term sooner or later. It is applicable, of course, only in the most general sense: his revolutionary politics, like the relations between sovereign states, was carried on without regard to traditional moral norms, secular or sacred. To call Nechaev "Machiavellian" is about as illuminating and precise as to apply the same term to Bismarck, which has been done as often.

For Albert Camus, writing around 1950, Nechaev foreshadowed the nihilist revolutions of the twentieth century that de-

voured their children, a perspective hard to escape even now.⁷¹ Previously, Camus wrote, there had been a "community of the oppressed," by whom and for whom the revolution was to be made. But Nechaev regarded his cohorts as wholly expendable, as cannon fodder. No revolutionary activist had taken this position so clearly and openly before. But while accepting Camus's perspective, we should observe that his rhetoric takes us far from Nechaev's world. "The community of the oppressed" is an elegant phrase, a compassionate phrase, with just a hint of pathos about it. As when Camus decries "the violence done to one's brothers," we are sensible that we are hearing the rhetoric of a humane person of the Left, a secularized Christian with the experience of the French Resistance behind him. The rhetoric is sympathetic, educated, high-minded in a good sense.

But there is no trace, in Camus's words, of class or racial hatred—nor even an allowance for it. Nechaev did not, could not, recognize such phrases as "the community of the oppressed." At some level, he recognized his kinship with the more miserable and exploited portions of the Russian lower classes—but not the children of gentry Russia, the students he tried to recruit in Moscow or St. Petersburg. For they were the cousins—however "radical"—of the people who ran "the Russian Manchester" and in whose houses his father had carried a tray. The moralist may affirm "the community of the oppressed," but the historian must suspect its ability to explain.

Whatever the insufficiencies of Soviet Marxist historiography on Populism, B. P. Koz'min, the most formidable Soviet student of the problem, sniffed out what Camus's analysis leaves out: the pure, intoxicating, enduring hatred stemming from class. Vera Zasulich sensed it, too. He "was not a product of our intelligentsia milieu," she wrote in her memoirs,⁷² and he had as profound a scorn and hatred for his young disciples as for any other aspect of "their" society. But although Nechaev was from the *narod*, although he would make the revolution for its sake, although he hated the *narod* less, perhaps, than he did his radical friends, he had nevertheless fled from his origins into revolution. He was at home nowhere.

Nechaev failed, not because of his "immorality" but because he was a solitary, ignorant provincial who came too soon. Direct analogies between Nechaev and the makers of the Russian Revolution, of a kind which flourished for a time after 1917,⁷³ are intellectually vulgar and absurd. And yet Nechaev left his footprints in Russia's radical political culture. In the early years of the twentieth century, Lenin told Angelica Balabanoff, in answer to her pained question about the employment of dishonest means to seize power: "Everything that is done in the interest of the proletarian cause is honest."⁷⁴ Indeed, a great deal of Balabanoff's book *Impressions of Lenin* is about Lenin's belief that whatever advanced "the cause" was not only ethically sound but necessary—and her growing understanding of and disillusion with that belief. She is naive. Lenin and Trotsky thought her so, although they seem to have remained devoted to her to the last; Lloyd George or Franklin Roosevelt would have concurred in their judgment. All politicians *sometimes* act as if the end justifies the means. But in "bourgeois" political cultures most politicians are not able to admit their disposition publicly or practice it consistently. Clothe this kind of "Machiavellianism" in revolutionary costume and it seems to lose some of its shabby and uneasy air of "realism" and become plausible. Especially when its spokesman is not Nechaev but Vladimir Il'ich Lenin.* In the 1860s, Russian political culture began to become tough, Russian radicals unscrupulous, and the wellsprings of radical idealism more obscure. Nechaev's career is a way station on that path.

There is another connection here, one more easily described. Isaac Deutscher once remarked that "there is . . . the conflict of two souls, the Marxist and the Jacobin, in Bolshevism, a conflict never to be resolved either in Lenin or in Bolshevism at large."⁷⁵ At bottom, the persistent recurrence and

*There are few traces of Nechaev in Lenin's writings, or in the voluminous "encounters with Lenin"—"recollections of Lenin" literature. He did tell Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич in 1905 of his admiration for Nechaev and Tkachëv. "People completely forget," Lenin said, "that Nechaev possessed unique organizational talent, an ability to establish the special techniques of conspiratorial work everywhere, an ability to give his thoughts such startling formulations that they were forever imprinted on one's memory." Quoted in David Shub, *Lenin* (Garden City, N.Y., 1948), pp. 371-72.

development of authoritarian, hierarchical, and manipulative behavior among Russian radicals (which is largely what "Russian Jacobinism" is) springs from the material and cultural gap between the Russian elite and the working classes. From Pestel in the early nineteenth century to Lenin, Russian radicals irregularly but persistently concluded that the Russian masses were capable of enormous and destructive outbursts of rage but not of building a new order. The optimism characteristic of the Populist vision went against the grain of Russian radical experience, but in the end it gave way to the ruthless realism of Tkachëv and Lenin.

In Russia, "civil society," in the Marxist sense of the term, was always weak, as was the bourgeois world from which it sprang. The pursuit of egoistic private interest, the organizational and institutional means for the creation and enjoyment of wealth were until less than a century ago quite undeveloped. An almost medieval merchantry lingered far into the nineteenth century; industrial entrepreneurs of the Western type appeared very late and were more uncertain than elsewhere in Europe, their self-confidence undermined by the lingering power of agrarian and aristocratic attitudes on the Right and socialist egalitarianism on the Left. With some reform-minded aristocrats (as earlier with Herzen), it is difficult to label the hostility to the bourgeoisie as either feudal or socialist; it was both.

In any case, all "liberal," moderate, constitutional political life in Russia suffered from the resulting sense of weakness—often concealed below the surface of social and political life, but never very far below. One consequence, in the words of Leopold Haimson, was a

deficiency, characteristic of moderate and radical constitutionalists alike . . . the ultimate absence, in their confrontation of the redoubtable and omnipresent state power, of the sense—so pervasive among English country gentlemen in the eighteenth century House of Commons and among the deputies of the French Third Estate in 1789—that they constituted in their own right the adequate representatives of country and nation.⁷⁶

They could not, among other things, either shore up or replace the aristocratic *obshchestvo*, irrevocably in decline after 1861.

The purely industrial tasks that Marx had assigned the bourgeoisie were, however, accomplished—by the state. The first great industrialization drive took its impetus from Count Witte and the Ministry of Finance in the late imperial period; the second was accomplished in nightmare fashion by Stalin, after the Revolution. In that limited sense, it turned out the Populists were right: it was possible to “skip” capitalism. But many things that accompanied bourgeois rule in the West—ideas of citizenship, of social initiative and responsibility—were weakly developed or nonexistent in Russia. Whatever the cruelties of industrialization in Western Europe and America, whatever the degradation and oppression of bourgeois society—and we know they were great—the self-actualizing activity of individuals played its part in the birth of these things, and coexisted with them. Thus there remained a living tradition of citizen opposition to bureaucratic rule from above, whether public or private.

Although Russia had no bourgeoisie able to oppose the state and bureaucracy either culturally or politically, the intelligentsia rejected them outright; this moral and political revulsion had from the first an anarchist quality. Slavophilism arose after the autocracy had been expanding its regulatory and coercive authority over the population for more than a century, changing the crude and heavy-handed patriarchal monarchy into a powerful secular absolutism. The Slavophile critique of Peter the Great was the descendant of earlier attacks on both the secularization of the autocracy and on its final political triumph—which came largely over aristocratic and regional forces in Russia. Much of the Slavophile analysis was taken over by early Populists such as Herzen and Shchapov—more or less purged of its boyar point of view. They viewed the *narod* not as the bulwark of Holy Russia but as the shaping force that would create a new, socialist Russia. Both the Slavophiles and the Populists wrote ideological and tendentious histories of Russia, denigrating the autocracy and its sociopolitical rationalism, deifying the *narod*, and branding the state-builders as “aliens”: Mongols, Greeks, or Germans.

During the period of the so-called Great Reforms, decentralizing and antistatist currents appeared in politically moderate form, helping to inspire and direct the reforming impulse—most obviously in the provincialist ideologies that underlay the creation of the *zemstvos*.⁷⁷ But moderate antistatism never became a powerful force in Russia, largely because of the weakness of civil society; most of their converts during the remainder of the century were drawn from the “liberals” who gathered around the *zemstvos* and their auxiliary organizations.

In the short run, radical Populism was a much more important force, which could periodically threaten the government with serious political crises. Certainly the government's fear of the Populist Left helped sap its episodic efforts at reform after 1866—although it will not do to “blame” the radicals for the failure of liberal reform. Populism, however, could only challenge the state—historically, politically, mythically—in a total fashion. It could not seriously modify the scope or policies of the state or create competing structures; the Populists had no program, beyond the pathos of their intelligentsia belief in the *narod*. And Populist intellectuals were as hostile to the nascent bourgeois-capitalist order as to the old regime—if not more so. So had some kind of Populist coup actually “succeeded,” it could have survived only by bureaucratic rule of some kind: a “dictatorship of the peasantry” (as it might have been called), enduring most likely only until the legitimist monarchies of Europe could organize to crush it.

So in the unequal struggle between state and society that has in so many ways given content to Russian history, Slavophilism and Populism (and their more specifically anarchist descendants) have created only heroic myths and genealogies—which from time to time can still flare up into movements that tell us that one day the Russian intelligentsia and the Russian people will rise and overthrow their “alien,” bureaucratic oppressors.

But from within the Populist movement itself emerged the politically conscious Jacobinism that accepted the state, sought to seize it and to make the revolution that way. In Bolshevik form, a Russian Jacobinism came to power in 1917. Even in the early

days of the Revolution, many of the arguments and controversies of the Nechaev period resurfaced. Idealists like Angelica Balabanoff thought that the Bolsheviks "used" people in a way that was not permissible. She has described, in terms that recall Nechaev's *Catechism*, how foreign Communists who arrived in Moscow "were classified as superficial, naive, ambitious or venal. Then they were used according to this classification."⁷⁸ Under Stalin came the violent and terrible revolution from above. "The end justifies the means" meant one thing when Ishutin said it, another when the émigré Lenin said it, another when Lenin had come to power, yet another when it was Stalin who was in power. Yet those diverse meanings are connected. Stalin united the Machiavellianism of the Left and Right, as well as their solipsism. He could say, with Louis XIV, "*L'état, c'est moi*," but he was also—as Nechaev believed *he* was—the Revolution.